Imam al-aazam Abu Hanifah and his Expertise in Hadith

By

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Imām al-Azam Abū Ĥanīfah and his Expertise in Ĥadīth

(Born 80 A.H/689C.E-Died 150 A.H/767 C.E)

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين ـ الصلوٰة والسلام علیك یا سید المرسلین ـ

Nu'mān ibn Thābit was born in the city of Kufa (modern day Iraq) in the year 80 A.H /689 C.E.[1] He is better known as al-imām *al-Aážam* [2] (The Greatest Imām), or by his *kunyah* `Abū Ĥanīfah. Born into a family of tradesmen, the Imām's family was of Persian origin.[3] Imām Abū Ĥanīfah's father, Thābit, had met in the city of Kufa the companion Sayyedinā `Ali Ibn Abi Talib (rađiyAllāhu ánhu) who made *duā* for him and his progeny, and some say that Abū Ĥanīfah was a result of this *duā*. [4]

He is the first of the four *mujtahid* Imām and the only Successor *(tâbi`i)* among them, having seen the Companions Anas ibn Mālik,[5] Abdullāh ibn al-Hārith ibn Juz' al-Zabidi, Jābir ibn Abdullāh, Ma`qal ibn Yasar, Wa'sila ibn al-Asqa`, `A'isha bint Hajrad and `Abdullāh ibn Anis.[6] A person becomes a *tābi`i*

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[1] Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 6:391. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risāah, 1417/1996.

[الإمام، فقيه الملة، عالم العراق أبو حنيفة النعمان بن ثابت بن زوطى التيمي، الكوفي، مولى بني تيم الله بن ثعلبة يقال: إنه من أبناء الفرس. ولد سنة ثمانين في حياة صغار الصحابة.]

[2] Imām Dhahabi: Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:168. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1374/1956

[الإمام الأعظم فقيه العراق]

[3] Ibn Hajar: Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, 4:229. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah.1416/1995

[4] Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 6:395. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996.

[5] Imām Dhahabi; Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 6:391. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996

[6] This is the verdict of Ibn Hajar as recorded by Imām Suyūtī: Tabyid al-sahifa, p.34. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1410/1990

(successor) by meeting a *Sahābi* (a companion of the Prophet, ṣallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam) and seeing him. It is not a condition that he keeps his company and narrates from the *Sahābi*.[7]

Some said that Imām Abū Ĥanīfah narrated from seven companions[8] while others said that he narrated from eighteen companions.[9]

He is one of the four Imāms whose school of jurisprudence is followed.[10] Imām Abū Ĥanīfah was the first to start the systematic study of Jurispr udence[11], analyse Islamic Jurisprudence and divide it into subjects.

It has been authentically narrated that Sufyān al-Thawri (d. 161 A.H) praised Imām Abū Ĥanīfah. Sufyān al –Thawri said: "Imām Abū Ĥanīfah was the best Jurist (*faqih*) from the inhabitants of earth."[12] Sufyān al -Thawri stood up when Abū Ĥanīfah visited him after his brother's death, and he said: "This man holds a high rank in knowledge, and if I did not stand up for his knowledge, I would stand up for his age, and if not for his age then for his piety and if not for his piety then for his

[7] Imām Ibn Hajar: Nuzhat al-nazar, p.143. Riyadh: Al Maktaba Al Wataniya, 1422/2001

[8] Ibn Kathir: Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya, 13:416. Riyadh:Dār Alam al Kutub,1424/2003

[9] al-Haytami: al-Khayrāt al-hisān fi manaqib Abi Hanifah al-Nu`mān, p.25, Egypt, 1324/1906

[10] Ibn Kathir: Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya, 13:416. Riyadh:Dār Alam al Kutub,1424/2003

[11] al-Haytami: al-Khayrāt al-hisān fi manāqib Abi Hanifāh al-Nu`mān, p.32, Egypt, 1324/1906

[12] al-Khatib al-Baghdadi :Tarikh Baghdad, 15:471. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islami , 1422/2001

[من عند أبي حنيفة فيقول لقد جئت من عند أفقه أهل الأرض]

Jurisprudence. [13]

'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak (d.181 A.H/797 C.E) said "Abū Ĥanīfah is the best in Jurisprudence among the people. I have not seen the like of him in Jurisprudence."[14]

His authority in the field of Jurisprudence can be realised by reading the statement of Imām Shāfi'i, who said: "People are dependent on Abū Ĥanīfah in the field of Jurisprudence. I have not seen anyone better in Jurisprudence than Abū Ĥanīfah."[15] In another statement he said: "People are children to Abū Ĥanīfah in Jurisprudence." Imām Dhahabi added: "Leadership in the matters of Jurisprudence and its detail belongs to him and there is no doubt on this issue".[16]

al-'A'mash [d.148 A.H/765 C.E] who was an authority in the field of ĥadīth (*muhaddith*) said to Abū Ĥanīfah: "O Nu'mān! What is your opinion regarding such-and-such matter?" He replied: "Such-and-such." He said: "From where do you say this?" He said: "You narrated to us *ĥadīth from* so-and-so such-and-such." Al-'A'mash said: "O group of Jurists, you are the

[13] ibid,15:467-8

[وما أنكرت من ذاك هذا رجل من العلم بمكان فان لم أقم لعلمه قمت لسنه وإن لم أقم لسنه قمت لفقهه وإن لم أقم لفقهه قمت لورعه فاجمني فلم يكن عندى جواب]

[14] ibid,15:469

[وأما أفقه الناس فأبو حنيفة ثم قال ما رأيت فى الفقه مثله]

[15] ibid,15:474

[الشافعي يقول الناس عيال على أبي حنيفة فى الفقه الشافعي يقول ما رأيت أحدا أفقه من أبي حنيفة]

[16] Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 6:403. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996

[وقال الشافعي: الناس فى الفقه عيال على أبي حنيفة. قلت: الإمامة فى الفقه ودقائقه مسلمة إلى هذا الإمام. وهذا أمر لا شك فيه]

doctors, and we are the pharmacists."[17] In another narration al-'A'mash has been recorded to have said: "You have achieved both the stations [of a *muhaddith* as well as a Jurist].[18]"He meant that the narrators of *aĥadīth* merely narrate the *aĥadīth* just as a pharmacist distributes medicine, but the Jurist show the application of these *aĥadīth* just as a doctor prescribes the appropriate medicine for the appropriate illness.

To become a Jurist of the highest rank [*mujtahid mutlaq*], one of the necessary requirement is to be an expert in the science of *ĥadīth*. As for the breadth of a Jurist's knowledge, it is recorded that Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal's student Muhammad ibn 'Ubaydullah ibn al-Munadi heard a man ask him (Imām Ahmad): "When a man has memorised 100,000 *aĥadīth*, is he a scholar of Jurisprudence?" And he said, "No." The man asked, "200,000 then?" And he said, "No." The man asked, "Then 300,000?" And he said, "No." The man asked, "400,000?" And Ahmad gestured with his hand to signify "about that many"[19].

The superiority of a Jurist over a scholar of *ĥadīth* (*muhaddith*) has been conveyed by the Prophet şallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam in a narration recorded by Abū Dawūd. Narrated Zayd ibn Thābit: I heard the Apostle of Allāh (peace be upon him) say: May Allāh

[17] Ibn Hibbān: Kitāb al-Thiqāt, 8:467.India: Dairatul Ma'arif, 1393/1973

[قال: الأعمش أنتم يا معشر الفقهاء الأطباء ونحن الصيادلة]

[18] al-Haytami: al-Khayrāt al-hisān fi manaqib Abi Hanīfah al-Nu`mān,p.69, Egypt,1324/1906

[وأنت أيها الرجل أخذت بكلا الطرفين]

[19] Ibn al-Qayyim: I'lam al-muwaqqi'in, 6:115. Saudi Arabia: Dār ibn al Jawziyyah, 1423/2002

[رواية محمد بن عبيد الله بن المنادى وقد سمع رجلا يساله اذا حفظ الرجل مائة الف حديث يكون فقيها قال لا قال فمائتى ألف قال لا قال فثلاثمائة الف قال لا قال فأربعمائة الف قال بيده هكذا وحركها.

brighten a man who hears a tradition (*ĥadīth*) from us; gets it by heart and passes it on to others. Many a bearer of knowledge conveys it to one who is more versed than he is; and many a bearer of knowledge is not versed in it[20].

The meaning of the narration is that many *muhaddith* (those who transmit the *ĥadīth*) merely transmit the *ĥadīth* and convey it to the Jurists who deduce ruling from these *aĥadīth*.

Imām Abū Ĥanīfah was a Jurist of the highest order. He was an absolute *mujtahid* (*mujtahid mutlaq*). He was able to derive rulings from the texts through his own linguistic and juridical perspicuity. He not only memorised thousands of *aĥadīth* but was also able to use those *aĥadīth* for deriving the laws of Jurisprudence. Reiterating the view of Imām al-'A'mash, another scholar of *ĥadīth*, Imām Abu `Isa al- Tirmidhi (d. 279 A.H/892 C.E) said:"The Jurists are more knowledgeable of the meaning of *ahādīth*[21]".

Once it is established that Imām Abū Ĥanīfah was a Jurist of the highest order, it is understood that he was a master in the science of ĥadīth, which is one of the pre requisites to be a *mujtahid mutlaq*.

[20] AbūDawūd: Sunan, 4:46, Chapter: *Kitāb al ilm*, no.3660. Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 1418/1997

نضر الله امرأ سمع منا حديثا فحفظه حتى يبلغه فرب حامل فقه إلى من هو أفقه منه ورب حامل فقه ليس بفقيه

[21] Tirmidhi: Jami` at-Tirmidhi, 3:307, Chapter: Kitāb *al Janā'iz*, no.990. Egypt: Mustafā Al-Babi Al-Halabi, 1398/1978.

قال الفقهاء وهم أعلم بمعاني الحديث

Kufa at the time of the Imām's birth [in 80 A.H] was a great center of knowledge and learning, with many of the noble Prophet's (ṣallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam) companions having taken residence there. The successor (*tāb'i*) Qatāda bin Diama (d.117A.H/735 C.E) said that one thousand and fifty companions of the Prophet (ṣallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam) settled in the city of Kufa among which twenty four were those who participated in the battle of Badr[22].

The vast amount of *aĥadīth* narrated by these companions were memorised by Imām Abū Ĥanīfah.It would not be wise to say that having been born at the center of ĥadīth transmission, the Imām did not learn the science of *ĥadīth*!

It has been recorded that Imām Abū Ĥanīfah travelled extensively to increase his knowledge of ĥadīth. Imām Dhahabi writes: "Imām Abū Ĥanīfah travelled extensively in search of ĥadīth especially after 100 A.H". [23]

Imām al- Sam'ānī [d.562A.H/1166C.E] an authority in the field of ĥadīth and history, writes: "When he [Imām Abū Ĥanīfah] engaged himself in the pursuit of knowledge, he went into the

[22] Imām Sakhāwi: Fatḥ al-mughīth bi-sharḥ Alfīyat al-ḥadīth lil-Irāqī, 4:111. Egypt: Maktabah As sunnah, 1424/2003

وقال قتادة: ٠٠ل الكوفة من الصحابة ألف وخمسون; منهم أربعة وعشرون بدريون

[23] Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 6:396. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996.

[الإمام أبا حنيفة طلب الحديث وأكثر منه فى سنة مائة وبعدها]

depth of knowledge and attained such a rank which others could not."[24]

Imām Abū al-Mu'ayyid Al-Muwaffaq ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Makki al-Khawārizmi (d.568 A.H/1172 C.E) has recorded that Imām Abū Ĥanīfah learnt religious sciences from around four thousand teachers. He has mentioned the names of two hundred and forty six teachers.[25]

One of the teachers in this list is Imām Sha'bi (d.104 A.H/722 C.E), who has been reported to have met five hundred companions of the Prophet (ṣallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam)[26] and narrated ĥadīth from one hundred and fifty companions of the Prophet (ṣallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam)[27]. He was one of the chief teachers of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah[28]. When such is the status of one of the teachers of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah, then imagine the amount of knowledge which Imām Abū Ĥanīfah would have received from all of his teachers!

[24] 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammed al- Sam'ānī :Kitāb al-Ansāb; 6:67.Cairo: Maktaba Ibn Taymiyyah, 1400/1980

واشتغل بطلب العلم وبالغ فيه حتى حصل له ما لم يحصل لغيره

[25] al-Khawārzimi: Manaqib al- Imām al- Aážam, 1:67-88. India: Da'irat al-Ma'arif, 1321/1894

[26] Imām Dhahabi: Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:81. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1374/1956

[شعبة عن منصور بن عبد الرحمن عن الشعبى قال: أدركت خمسمائة من أصحاب النبى صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم]

[27] Ibn Hibbān: Kitāb al-Thiqāt, 5:186. India: Da'irat al-Ma'arif, 1398/1978

رَوَى عن: خمسين ومائة من أصحاب رسول الله صلَّى الله عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ]

[28] Imām Dhahabi: Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:79. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1374/1956

وهو أكبر شيخ لأبي حنيفة

Abu Muhammad 'Abdullāh bin Muhammad bin Yāqūb bin al Hārith al Hārithi [d. 340 A.H/ 952 C.E] has recorded on the authority of Yahyā bin Nasr that he said, "I entered upon Imām Abū Ĥanīfah's place which was filled with books, so I said, "what is this"? He (Imām Abū Ĥanīfah) said, "These are all *aĥadīth*. I have narrated only a few of them from which people can derive benefit.[29]"

'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak, who is an authority in the field of ĥadīth, narrated ĥadīth from Imām Abū Ĥanīfah[30]. He has been authentically reported to have said: "If anyone has the right to issue [a legal verdict] using his opinion, Abū Ĥanīfah has the right to issue using his opinion.[31]"

Abu Muhammad Al-Hasan ibn Abd ar-Rahmān Khallad Al-Rāmahurmuzi (d. 360 A.H/970 C.E) wrote al-Muhaddith al-Fāsil Bayn al-Rawi wa al-Wa`i ("The Ĥadīth Scholar That Differentiates Between Narrators and Containers"). It was the first comprehensive book on ĥadīth science ever written. In this book he writes: "Whenever Imām Sh'uba and Imām Sufyān al Thawri had a difference of opinion regarding a ĥadīth, they would say "let us go to Mis'ar [ibn Kidam] as he is the scale of authority in this field".[32]

Both, Imām Sh'uba (d. 160 A.H/777 C.E) and Imām Sufyān al-Thawri (d.161A.H/778C.E) were authorities in the field of ĥadīth. When they had a disagreement they used to visit Imām Mis'ar ibn Kidam, whose narrations are found in the six major collections of ĥadīth. This is enough to show the high status of Imām Mis'ar ibn Kidam [d.155 A.H/772 C.E] in the science of ĥadīth.

Imām Mis'ar ibn Kidam who is an authority in the field of ĥadīth, said: "We attained the science of ĥadīth with Abū Ĥanīfah but he surpassed us. Then we opted for asceticism (abandoning the desire of the world) and he outstripped us in this as well. Thereafter, we started competing with him in Jurisprudence and his Juristic excellence is before you![33]"

Imām Shu'ba bin al-Hajjāj was an expert in the science of criticism and praise of ĥadīth narrator (*Jarh wa Ta'dīl)*. Ibn 'Abd

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[29] Yāqūb al Hārithi: Musnad Abū Ĥanīfah, p.276, no.805. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1429/2008

[حديث مرفوع: كَتَبَ إِلَيَّ صَالِحُ بْنُ أَبِي رُمَيْحٍ, أَخْبَرَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَمْرٍو الْوَرَّاقُ, أَخْبَرَنَا خَالِدُ بْنُ ... ارٍ, أَخْبَرَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ نَصْرِ بْنِ حَاجِبٍ, قَالَ: دَخَلْتُ عَلَى أَبِي حَنِيفَةَ, فِي بَيْتٍ مَمْلُوءٍ كُتُبًا فَقُلْتُ: مَا هَذَا؟ قَالَ: هَذِهِ أَحَادِيثُ كُلُّهَا, وَمَا حَدَّثْتُ بِهِ إِلا الْيَسِيرَ الَّذِي يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ].

[30] Ibn Abi Shaybah: Musannaf, 7:574 (no.12532) and 14:342 (no.28611) Beirut: Dar Qurtuba, 1427/2007

[31] al-Khatib al-Baghdadi :Tarikh Baghdad, 15:471. Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami , 1422/2001

عبد الرزاق يقول سمعت بن المبارك يقول إن كان أحد ينبغي له أن يقول برايه فأبو حنيفة ينبغي له أن يقول برأيه أخبرني

[32] al-Rāmahurmuzi: Muhaddith al-Fāsil Bayn; P 395, no.402. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1391/ 1971

[حدثنا عبد الله بن أحمد الغزاء قال: سمعت ابراهيم بن سعيد الجوهري يقول: كان شعبة وسفيان اذا اختلفا قالا: اذهبا بنا الى الميزان مسعر.]

[33] Imām Dhahabi: Manāqib al- Imām Abi Hanīfah wa Sahibayh, p.43.India: Jannat Ihya al-Ma'arif al-Nu'maniyyah, 1366/1947

[أبو يحيى بن أبي مَيْسَرة: ثنا خَلَّاد بن يحيى قال: قال مِسْعَرُ بن كِدَام: طلبتُ مع أبي حنفية الحديث فغَلَبنا، وأخذنا في الزهد فَبَرع علينا، وطلبنا معه الفقه فجاء منه ما تَرَوْن.]

al-Barr narrates through his chain of narration that Shu'bah bin al-Hajjāj had good opinion about Imām Abū Ĥanīfah.[34]

Makki ibn Ibrāhim (126 A.H/744C.E– 214 A.H/829C.E) is an authority in the field of ĥadīth sciences and one of the senior most teachers of Imām Bukhāri. He has narrated *ĥadīth* from Imām Abū Ĥanīfah .He praised Imām Abū Ĥanīfah by saying: "He was the most knowledgeable of the people in his time.[35]"

Imām al-Mizzi writes: Sālih ibn Muhammad al-Asadi al-Hāfiz said: I heard Yahyā ibn Ma'in [d.233 A.H/847 C.E] say: "Abū Ĥanīfah was trustworthy in *ĥadīth*. He did not narrate a *ĥadīth* except that which he remembered.[36]"

Imām al-Dhahabi wrote: "Logic, dialectics and the philosophy of the ancients were not, by Allāh, from the sciences of the *Sahābah*, nor the *Tabi'in*, nor al-Awza'i, al-Thawri, Mālik and Abū Ĥanīfah. Rather, their sciences were the Qur'ān and

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[34] Ibn 'Abd al-Barr: Al-Intiqa fi Fadā'il al-A'immati l-Thalāthāt al-Fuqahā, p.196. Beirut: Dār al-Bashāir al-Islamiyyah, 1417/1997.

شبابة بن سوار يقول كان شعبة حسن الرأى فى أبى حنيفة

[35] al-Khatib al-Baghdadi :Tarikh Baghdad, 15:473. Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami , 1422/2001

[وقال النخعى حدثنا إسماعيل بن محمد الفارسى قال سمعت مكى بن إبراهيم ذكر أبا حنيفة فقال كان أعلم أهل زمانه]

[36] al-Mizzi:Tahdhib al-Kamāl 29:424.Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1408/1987, Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 6:395. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996, al-Khatib al-Baghdadi :Tarikh Baghdad, 13:419. Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami , 1422/2001

وقال صالح بن محمد الاسدى الحافظ: سمعتُ يحيىٰ بن معين يقول: كان أبو حنيفة ثقة فى الحديث.

ĥadīth.[37]" This is sufficient evidence to indicate the expertise of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah in the field of Qur'ān and *ĥadīth*.

Ali ibn al-Madini (d. 235 A.H/850 C.E) said: "Al-Thawri, Ibn al-Mubārak, Hammād ibn Zayd, Hushaym, Waki' ibn al-Jarrāh, 'Abbād ibn al-'Awām and Ja'far ibn 'Awn narrated from Abū Ĥanīfah. He is trustworthy there is no harm in him.[38]"

Abu 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463 A. H/1071CE) has mentioned names of sixty seven scholars in the field of *ĥadīth* and Jurisprudence. After mentioning these names he writes: "All of them have praised Imām Abū Ĥanīfah with lofty words."[39]

Imām Abū Dawūd [d.275 A.H/897C.E], the compiler of Sunan, an undisputed authority in the field of *ĥadīth*, said: "Allāh have mercy on Mālik, he was an Imām, Allāh have mercy on al-Shāfi'i,

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[37] Imām Dhahabi: Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:205. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1374/1956

بعلم المنطق والجدل وحكمة الأوائل التى تسلب الايمان وتورث الشكوك والحيرة التى لم تكن والله من علم الصحابة ولا التابعين ولا من علم الأوزاعى والثورى ومالك وأبى حنيفة وابن أبى ذئب وشعبة ولا والله عرفها ابن المبارك. ولا أبو يوسف القائل من طلب الدين بالكلام تزندق ولا وكيع ولا ابن مهدى ولا ابن وهب ولا الشافعى ولا عفان ولا أبو عبيد ولا ابن المدينى واحمد وأبو ثور والمزنى والبخارى والأثرم ومسلم والنسائى وابن خزيمة وابن سريج وابن المنذر وأمثالهم بل كانت علومهم القرآن والحديث والفقه والنحو وشبه ذلك نعم!

[38] Ibn 'Abd al-Barr: Jami'Bayān al-'Ilm wa Fadlih, p. 1083, no.2112. Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzi, 1414/1994

وقال على بن المدينى: أبو حنيفة روىٰ عنه الثورى وابن المبارك وحماد بن زيد وهشيم ووكيع بن الجراح وعباد بن العوام وجعفر بن عون، وهو ثقة لا بأس به.

[39] Ibn 'Abd al-Barr: Al-Intiqa fi Fadā'il al-A'immati l-Thalāthāt al-Fuqahā, p.193-229. Beirut: Dār al-Bashāir al-Islamiyyah, 1417/1997

he was an Imām, Allāh have mercy on Abū Ĥanīfah; he was an Imām.[40]"

Imām Dhahabi [d.748 A.H/1347 C.E] is one of the most strict *ĥadīth* scholars to be born in the Islāmic history. He laid down very stringent conditions for accepting any narrator of the *ĥadīth* to be trustworthy. This Imām Dhahabi not only wrote a book in praise of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah but praised Imām Abū Ĥanīfah in his other works as well.

Dhahabi included Imām Abū Ĥanīfah in *Tadhkirat al-huffāz*, which he introduced with the words: "This is the memorial of the names of those who were declared the trustees among the carriers of the Science of the Prophet and to whose *ijtihād* one refers concerning matters of narrator-certification, authentication and falsification.[41]

Regarding Khārijah Ibn Zayd Ibn Thābit, Imām Dhahabi writes: "He was a major scholar of Jurisprudence, but narrated only a few ĥadīth. Hence I have not included him in the *huffāz* (memoriser) of ĥadīth."[42] Similarly, Imām Dhahabi has not

[40] ibid,p.67

سمعت أبا داؤد سليمان بن الأشعث بن اسحاق السجستانی رحمه الله يقول: رَحِمَ الله مالكا كان اماماً. رحم الله الشافعی كان اماماً. رحم الله أبا حنيفة كان اماماً.

[41] Imām Dhahabi: Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:1. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1374/1956

هذه تذكرة بأسماء معدلی حملة العلم النبوی ومن يرجع الی اجتهادهم فی التوثيق والتضعيف، والتصحيح والتزييف وبالله اعتصم وعليه اعتمد واليه انيب

[42] ibid; 1:91

خارجة بن زيد بن ثابت الأنصاری المدنی أحد الفقهاء من كبار العلماء الا انه قليل الحديث فلهذا لم أذكره فی الحفاظ رحمه الله تعالى

mentioned those people in his book who were although *huffāz* of the ĥadīth, but were not accepted as a trustworthy narrator. Imām Dhahabi writes: "Hishām bin Muhammed al-Kalbi, *hāfiz* [memoriser of ĥadīth], but is among the *matruk* (abandoned) narrators. He was not trustworthy. Hence I have not included him among the *huffāz* of the ĥadīth."[43]

It is in this *Tadhkirat al-huffāz*, Imām Dhahabi describes Imām Abū Hanīfah as "al-Imām *al- Aážam*" (The Greatest Imām)[44] and devotes many pages in praise of Imām Abū Hanīfah and his teachers. This leaves with no doubt that Imām Abū Hanīfah was not only a major ĥadīth narrator but was a trustworthy narrator also.

Imām Shāfi'i said: "Knowledge revolves around three men: Mālik [bn Anas,], Laith [ibn Sā`d] and [Sufyān] ibn `Uyaynah.". After writing this statement of Imām Shāfi'i , Imām Dhahabi adds: "I say there are seven others around whom the knowledge revolves and they are: al Awzā'i, al Thawri, Muammar, Abū Ĥanīfah, Shu'ba, Hammād and Hammād bin Zayd."[45]

[43] ibid; 1:343

هشام بن الكلبی الحافظ أحد المتروكين ليس بثقة فلهذا لم أدخله بين حفاظ الحديث

[44] Ibid; 1:168

أبو حنيفة الامام الأعظم فقيه العراق

[45] Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 8:94. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996.

قَالَ الشَّافِعِيُّ: العِلْمُ يَدُوْرُ عَلَى ثَلاَثَةٍ: مَالِكٍ، وَاللَّيْثِ، وَابْنِ عُيَيْنَةَ. قُلْتُ: بَلْ وَعَلَى سَبْعَةٍ مَعَهُم، وَهُمُ: الأَوْزَاعِيُّ، وَالثَّوْرِيُّ، وَمَعْمَرٌ، وَأَبُو حَنِيْفَةَ، وَشُعْبَةُ، وَالحَمَّادَانِ

Dhahabi relates that, Waki` bn al-Jarrāh gave religious verdict (*fatwā*) according to what Abū Ĥanīfah said and Yahyā al-Qattan also used to give *fatwā* according to what Abū Ĥanīfah said.[46]

Imām Dhahabi includes Imām Abū Ĥanīfah along with Imām Sai'd ibn musayyab, Imām Sha'bi, Imām Nakhai, Imām Zuhri, Imām 'Awzai and Imām 'Amash in the list of some of the great scholars who were the leaders of *ummah* during their time. All these scholars were expert in *ĥadīth*. By mentioning Imām Abū Ĥanīfah along with these ĥadīth scholars, Imām Dhahabi has shown that Imām Abū Ĥanīfah was an authority in the field of *ĥadīth*.[47]

Imām Dhahabi writes "Towards the end of 150 A.H when most of the *tabi'een* (successors) had passed away, then a group of people took up the task of narrator certification, authentication and falsification. Imām Abū Ĥanīfah criticised Jābir al-Ja'fi, by saying: "I never saw a greater liar than Jābir al-Ja'fi"[48]

[46] Imām Dhahabi: Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:307. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1374/1956

قال يحيىٰ: ما رأيت أفضل منه يقوم الليل ويسرد الصوم ويفتى بقول أبي حنيفة وكان يحيى القطان يفتى بقول أبي حنيفة أيضا

[47] Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 9:525. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996.

[48] Dhahabi: Dhikr min Yu'tamad Qaulah fil Jarah wal Tā'deel, p.175. Beirut: Dār al-Bashair al-Islamiyyah, 1410/1990

فلما كان عند انقراض عامّةِ التابعين فى حدود الخمسين ومئة. تكلّم طائفة من الجهابذة فى التوثيق والتضعيف. فقال أبو حنيفة: ما رأيتُ أكذب من جابر الجُعْفى

This criticism of Jābir al-Ja'fi was retained by Imām Ibn 'Adi[49] and Imām at-Tirmidhi, who relates through his chain of narration in which Imām Abū Ĥanīfah said: "I never saw a greater liar than Jābir al-Ja'fi and nor anyone more superior than 'Atā ibn Abū Rabah."[50] Imām Dhahabi writes: Abū Hanīfah said "I have seen both, Rabi'a and Abū Zanād but Abū Zanād is a better jurist".[51] Imām Dhahabi uses this approval by Imām Abū Hanīfah for narrator certification. This is clear evidence that Imām Abū Hanīfah was cautious in narrating ĥadīth and was an authority in the science of criticism and praise of ĥadīth narrator.

It should be noted that if a scholar of *ĥadīth* does not narrate from a particular narrator, then that does not amount to that narrator being weak (*da'if*) or untrustworthy. For instance, Imām Bukhārī in his *Sahih al–Bukhārī* has narrated only two *aĥadīth* from Imām Ahmad bin Hanbal, out of which only one is narrated directly from Imām Hanbal. This does not imply that Imām Ahmad bin Hanbal was a weak narrator. Similarly Imām Bukhārī has not narrated even one ĥadīth through Imām Shafi'i, which does not mean Imām Shafi'i was a weak narrator. There are many reasons why some times trustworthy narrators are

[49] Ibn 'Adi: al-Kāmil fi al-du 'afa', 2:113 .Beirut: Dār al Fikr ,1409/1988

[50] Abū `Isa Muhammad at-Tirmidhī: Jami` at-Tirmidhi, 5:741, *Kitāb al –'ilal*. Cairo: Mustafā al-Babi al-Halabi, 1398/1978

حدثنا محمود بن غيلان حدثنا أبو يحيى الحمانى قال سمعت أبا حنيفة يقول ما رأيت أحدا أكذب من جابر الجعفى ولا أفضل من عطاء بن أبي رباح

[51] Imām Dhahabi: Tadhkirat al-huffāz, 1:135. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1374/1956

وقال أبو حنيفة رأيت ربيعة وأبا الزناد وأبو الزناد أفقه الرجلين

not included in the chain of narration. For example, during the time of Imām Bukhārī, there was an issue of the creation of the Qur'ân. Imām Muhammed ibn Yahyā adh-Dhuhlī was one of the teachers of Imām Bukharī. He considered the pronunciation of the Qur'ān as eternal and Imām Bukhārī said, 'Our actions are created and the pronunciation is one our actions.' The disagreement was only over the pronunciation (*lafz*) of the Qur'ān, not the words of the Qur'ān. This difference of view led to the disagreement between Imām Dhuhlī and his student, Imām Bukharī. After this, mass propaganda started against Imām Bukhārī, which led to accusations that he believed the words of the Qur'ān to be created. When Imām Dhuhlī heard these rumors, he disconnected his ties with Imām Bukhārī and became his foe. He started warning people by announcing that they should not attend the lectures of Imām Bukhārī. As a result, people refrained from sitting in his lectures, except Imām Muslim ibn Hajjāj. At last, due to his disappointment, Imām Bukhārī left the city of Nīshāpūr and returned to Bukhārā.[52]

What has to be observed is that when everybody stopped sitting in the lectures of Imām Bukharī, his student Imām Muslim ibn Hajjāj, did not leave his teacher. In spite of this closeness, Imām Muslim ibn Hajjāj has not narrated a single *ĥadīth* in his book Sahih *Muslim* from his teacher, Imām Bukharī. Similarly Imām Muslim has not narrated any *ĥadīth* from Imām Dhuhuli, who happened to be his teacher as well. Here, we see Imām Muslim ibn Hallaj, taking precaution at the time of rumour. His not

[52] Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 12:458. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996.

narrating *aĥadīth* from Imām Bukharī or Imām Dhuhuli does not make Imām Bukharī and Dhuhuli as weak (*da'if*) narrators.

Imām Abū Ĥanīfah defined *Imān* (faith) as declaration of the tongue and acceptance by the heart whereas some other scholars defined *Imān* as declaration of the tongue and action of the limbs. Imām Abū Ĥanīfah considered actions to be the light of *Imān*, where as others considered actions to be the integral part of *Imān.* This disagreement of expressing the same thing but in different ways of polemics (*kalām*) led to the confusion among many people. A few enemies of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah who were jealous with his popularity spread rumors that Imām Abū Ĥanīfah does not consider good actions to be a part of Islam itself! It was because of this rumour that many scholars of *ĥadīth* took precaution in not narrating *aĥadīth* from Imām Abū Ĥanīfah. However, this does not make him a weak (*da'if*) narrator.

Highlighting this fact, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah wrote: "There is no doubt regarding Imām Abū Ĥanīfah's knowledge. People later attributed many lies to Imām Abū Ĥanīfah, which were all untrue. The aim of such writings was to taint Imām Abū Ĥanīfah.[53]"

Imām Muhammed Ibn al-Hasan ash-Shaybāni [d.189A.H/805C.E] the foremost student of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah, compiled the narrations from his teacher which he called *Kitāb al-Athār*. It

[53] Ibn Taymiyyah: Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah, 2:619. Cairo: Muassasat Qurtuba, 1406/1986

كما أن أبا حنيفة -وإن كان الناس خالفوه فى أشياء وأنكروها عليه- فلا يستريب أحد فى فقهه وفهمه وعلمه. وقد نقلوا عنه أشياء يقصدون بها الشناعة عليه، وهى كذب عليه قطعاً

was the first book composed in Islam after the generation of the Companions. Imām Abū Hanīfah laid down very strict conditions for narrating a ĥadīth. Imām al-Tahāwi [d.321A.H/933C.E] narrates with his chain of narration that Imām Abū Hanīfah said: "No man should narrate a ĥadīth unless he remembers it since the [first] day of hearing to the day of narrating."[54] Imām Dhahabi writes: "Imām Abū Ĥanīfah did not narrate a *ĥadīth* except that which he remembered". [55]

Imām al-Nawawī writes : The view of[Imām]Mālik and [Imām] Abū Ĥanīfah is that no *hadīth* can be used as an evidence unless the narrator narrates it from his memory. This is an extreme view." Commenting on the above Imam al-Suyūti writes: "This condition is very difficult and the scholars of *hadīth* have acted contrary to it because if we analyse *sahihayn* [Sahih al-Bukhāri and Sahih al-Muslim] we will not get many narrators who fulfilled this condition of memory."[56] It was because of this strict

[54] Mullā 'Ali al-Qāri: Sharh Musnad Abū Ĥanīfah, p.7. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah,1405/1985

قال الطحاوى حدثنا سليمان بن شعيب حدثنا أبي قال أملأ علينا أبو يوسف قال قال أبو حنيفة لا ينبغي للرجل أن يحدث من الحديث إلا بما حفظه من يوم سمعه إلى يوم يحدث به

[55] Imām Dhahabi: Siyar a`lām al-nubalā', 6:395. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1417/1996. This was reported by Imām al Mizzi and Imām Ibn Hajar al asqālani as well. [See fn.36]

قَالَ مُحَمَّدُ بنُ سَعْدٍ العَوْفِيُّ: سَمِعْتُ يَحْيَى بنَ مَعِيْنٍ يَقُوْلُ كَانَ أَبُو حَنِيْفَةَ ثِقَةً. لاَ يُحَدِّثُ بِالحَدِيْثِ إِلاَّ بِمَا يَحْفَظُه، وَلاَ يُحَدِّثُ بِمَا لاَ يَحْفَظُ

[56] al-Suyūti: Tadrib al-Rawi fi Sharh Taqrīb al-Nawawī, 2:55. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1417/1996

فمن المشدّدين من قال: لا حجّة الا فيما رواه من حفظه وتذ كره، روى عن مالك، وابى حنيفة، وأبي بكر الصيدلانى۔

condition that not many people could narrate *ĥadīth* from Imām Abū Ĥanīfah.

In the science of *ĥadīth*, the shorter the chain of narration, the higher is its value and strength. Imām Bukhārī [d.256A.H/ 870 C.E] compiled his famous *al-Jāmi' al-Musnad al-Sahīh*, popularly known as Sahih al-Bukhārī. Sahih al-Bukhārī contains twenty two narrations with only three narrators [*Thulāthiyāt*] between Imām Bukhārī and Prophet (şallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam). These twenty two chains are considered to be the loftiest. Out of these twenty two narrations, twenty are related by the students of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah. Of these twenty narrations, eleven narrations are from Makki bin Ibrahim alone, a student of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah!

Makki bin Ibrāhim was one of the teachers of Imām Bukhārī. In fact, Imām Bukhārī is a grand student of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah through many other chains of narration. We will suffice with one such chain of narration.

Imām Bukhari narrates from his father, Ismāil; who narra tes from Ibn Mubārak who narrates from Imām Abū Ĥanīfah.

Imām Ibn Hajar al–asqalāni writes: "Ismāil bin Ibrahim bin al-Mughira al-Ja'fai, the father of the compiler of *Al-sahih* [al-Bukhārī]. He narrated from Hammād Ibn Zaid and [Abdullāh] Ibn Mubārak"[57]. Imām Bukhārī writes that Ibn Mubārak narrated

[57] Ibn Hajar: Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, 1:140. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1416/ 1995

إسماعيل بن إبراهيم بن المغيرة الجعفى البخارى والد الإمام صاحب الصحيح روى عن حماد بن زيد وابن المبارك،

from Imām Abū Ĥanīfah[58].

Hence it is clear that Imām Bukhārī's father narrated from Ibn Mubārak, who in turn narrated from Imām Abū Ĥanīfah.

Imām Ibn Hajar al–asqalāni writes: "The highest category of teachers from whom Imām Bukhāri narrates includes successors (*tabi'un*) like Makki bin Ibrāhim, Abu 'Asim al-Nabil, 'Ubaidullah bin Musā, Abu Nu'aim al-Fadal bin Dukain and Khallād bin Yahyā".[59]It is interesting to note that in this "highest category" of teachers except Khallād bin Yahyā all others are students of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah.[60]

The high rank of Imām Abū Hanīfah in the field of *ĥadīth* can be understood by realising the fact that he narrated about fifteen *ĥadīth* with one *sahābi* (companion) between him and the Prophet (şallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam). All the companions of the Prophet (şallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam) are upright and considered trustworthy in *ĥadīth* science. These narrations with one link between the narrator and the Prophet (şallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam) are called *wuhdān* or *uhādiyāt*. Out of the four Imāms of Jurisprudence Imām Abū Hanīfah alone has this high status. If there are two people between the narrator of the *ĥadīth* and the Prophet (şallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam) then the chain is called

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[58] Imām Bukhari: Tārikh al-Kabir, 4:81, no.2253.Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1407/1986

[نعمان بن ثابت أبو حنيفة الكوفى مولى لبنى تيم الله بن ثعلبة روى عنه عباد بن العوام وابن المبارك

وهشيم ووكيع ومسلم بن خالد وأبو معاوية والمقرى]

[59] Ibn Hajar al- asqalāni: Fath al-Bāri; 1:503.Riyadh: Sultān bin 'Abdul Aziz printing, 1421/2001

[60] Imām Dhahabi: Manāqib al- Imām Abi Hanīfah wa Sahibayh, p.20.India: Jannat Ihya al-Ma'arif al-Nu'maniyyah, 1366/1947

thunāiyāt. Imām Abū Hanīfah has narrated about five hundred *thunāiyāt*. Out of the four Imāms of Jurisprudence only Imām Abū Hanīfah and Imām Mālik have achieved this status of narrating *thunāiyāt*. And if there are three narrators between the narrator of the *ĥadīth* and the Prophet (şallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam), it is called *thulāthiyāt*. We have already discussed that Imām Bukhāri has twenty two *thulāthiyāt* (three links) but he has not narrated any *wuhdān* (one link) or *thunāiyāt* (two links) narration. On the other hand Imām Abū Hanīfah has narrated more than one thousand *thulāthiyāt*!

These narrations with one link, two links and three links between the Prophet (şallAllāhu álayhi wa sallam) and Imām Abū Hanīfah can be seen in Kitāb al-Athār of Imām Abu Yusūf (d.182 A.H/798 C.E), Kitāb al-Athār of Imām Muhammad bin al-Hassan al-Shaybāni (d.189 A.H/805 C.E), Manaqib al-Imām al-Aážam, Jaami' al-Masānīd; both by al-Khawārzimi (d.568A.H/ 1172C.E) and Manāqib al-Imām al-Aážam by al-Kurdari (d.827A.H/1424 C.E)

Imām Abū Ĥanīfah was a *wali* (friend) of Allah. He spent his entire life in learning, practicing and teaching Islam. Yahyā ibn Ma'in said: I heard Yahyā al-Qattān say: "We have sat in the company of Abū Ĥanīfah, by Allāh, and we heard from him. By Allāh, when I would look at him, I recognised in his face that he feared Allāh![61]" 'Ali ibn al-Madini narrated: I heard Sufyān ibn

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[61] al-Khatib al-Baghdadi :Tarikh Baghdad 15:482. Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1422/2001

[وورعه أخبرنا محمد بن أحمد بن رزق حدثنا أحمد بن على بن عمر بن حبيش الرازى قال سمعت محمد بن

أحمد بن عصام يقول سمعت محمد بن سعد العوفى يقول سمعت يحيى بن معين يقول (Contd next page)

'Uyaynah say: "Abū Ĥanīfah was an honourable person, and he would perform much prayers (*Salāh*) from his early life.[62]"

May Allah elevate the status of Imām Abū Ĥanīfah in both the worlds and help us to follow his teachings. Ameen.

Muhammed Fazlullāh Sābri Chishti

India, 18th Dhu al-Hijjah 1433 AH

4 November 2012 CE

سمعت يحيى القطان يقول جالسنا والله أبا حنيفة وسمعنا منه و كنت والله إذا نظرت إليه عرفت فى وجهه أنه يتقى الله عزوجل

[62] ibid,15:483

[أخبرنا أبو نعيم الحافظ أخبرنا عبد الله بن جعفر بن فارس فيما أذن لى أن أرويه عنه قال حدثنا هارون بن سليمان حدثنا على بن المدينى قال سمعت سفيان بن عيينة يقول كان أبو حنيفة له مروءة وله صلاة فى أول زمانه]

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